

The Short Story

Introduction:

As we begin to look at short stories in this unit, it is important to consider how condensation makes a short story different from other works of fiction:

- the reader must discern the **setting** and **characters** early on in the story
- the reader must pick up the **background** of the story and characters quickly. These elements may be subtle or indirectly presented by the author
- the reader must recognize that the author of a short story has to catch the **reader's attention** quickly.

Origin and Development:

Examples of the earliest forms of short stories (in their simplest forms) are found in the Bible, classical stories, fables and myths. As we know it today, the short story appeared in the 19th century with the advent of magazines where editors searched for short fiction and articles. Some of the first short stories that appear at this time in Germany include Grimm's Fairy Tales (1812), and Hoffman's Gothic tales (1819).

Elements of a Short Story:

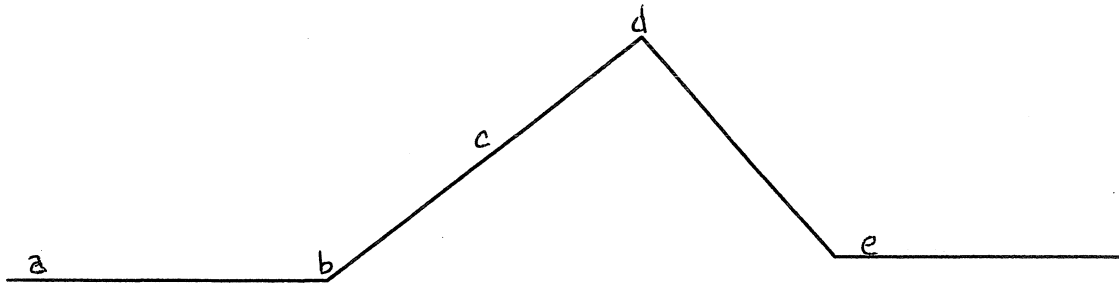
1.) **Plot:** The sequence in which the author arranges the events of a story. This sequence does not have to be in a chronological order. The plot of a short story almost always involves a **conflict between opposing forces**. There are **two** basic forms of conflict:

- **External Conflict:** occurs when a person comes into opposition with another person, with animals, or nature; anything apart from his/herself.
- **Internal Conflict:** occurs when a person is struggling within him/herself, i.e. - his conscience, fear, or indecision.

Plot structure is composed of **five** parts, in which the main character of the story struggles to resolve the conflict:

- a.) **Exposition** - presentation of **essential** information - who, what, where. We learn the background of the events to follow (this information may come later in the story in a flashback)
- b.) **Inciting force** - a problem in the story which produces the conflict and sets the plot in motion.
- c.) **Rising action** - the events in the story from the inciting force to the climax.
- d.) **Climax** - a moment of **high tension** in the story, often a decisive turning point. Usually the outcome of the conflict is determined in the climax, and the suspense subsides.

e.) **Denouement** – the ending of the story, or the resolution of the conflict. Some stories will have a definite end, whereas others will be more ambiguous, or hint at the resolution. The climax and the denouement can occur **simultaneously**.



2.) **Setting:** the time and place at which the story occurs. The setting can be established by **descriptive detail** of people and places, **dialect or speech mannerisms** of the characters, or the weavings of local customs or historical happenings into the story. The setting can contribute to the mood of the story, and may also help to explain the personality and behaviour of a character.

3.) **Theme:** the central idea, the view of life, or the truth about human experience. The theme **unifies** all the other elements of the short story – plot, character, and setting. The theme can often be phrased both in particular and in general terms.

Character:

A character in the story is a fictional person (including the narrator, who should not be confused with the author). Characters include the **protagonist** (the central character in conflict, and the **antagonist** (the force or forces working against the protagonist). Characters can be established by the author through the **description of appearance and personality**, **what the other characters in the story say about the character**, and through the **actions of the character**, as well as his or her **thoughts and statements**.

Point of View:

There are three points of view in a story: **omniscient** (all knowing), **objective** (removed from the situation; a neutral point of view), and **personal** (told in the first or third person in which the story is told from the perspective of one character and how events appear to him or her).